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SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 23 April 1981, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. JOHNSON (Ecuador)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (continued)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, before inviting the Working Group to resume consideration of the organization of future work, he wished to recall that under Economic and Social Council decision 1978/10, the Working Group had a mandate to prepare for the consideration of the Council recommendations on its methods of work in connexion with the reports of States parties to the Covenant. The Drafting Group had already reached agreement on a number of tentative proposals and must continue its work. The non-aligned countries had also put forward valuable proposals for action by the Drafting Group.

2. Mr. SVERRE (Norway) expressed surprise that the representatives of the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic had expressed opposition at the previous meeting to work continuing in the Drafting Group. The Drafting Group's meeting the previous afternoon had made useful, although relatively slow, progress and as the Soviet Union had participated willingly in that meeting, he wondered why it had suddenly changed its position. He wished to endorse the comments made by the representative of Senegal at the previous meeting. It was vitally important that the work in the Drafting Group should continue. The Working Group was up to date with its review of the reports of States parties and would in no way be interfering with that aspect of its work if it devoted the free time remaining to considering ways of improving its methods of work.

3. Mr. SOFINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his delegation wanted the Working Group to function efficiently and to review the reports of States parties in accordance with its mandate. The current discussion on how to enhance its effectiveness was, he believed, detracting from the Group's review function. The Working Group had agreed on an agenda at the beginning of its session and he was surprised that the representative of Norway, who had voted for that agenda, now wished to alter it and to consider future methods of work earlier than the last three days of the session, which had been allotted to the Group for that purpose.

4. It was clear from the absence of some members of the Working Group that other delegations than his own were also opposed to discussing methods of work at the present stage. The experience of the past few days had shown that the Group could not deal effectively with two important issues at the same time and he would prefer that it abide by its agenda. It was taking him every spare moment to prepare for the Group's review of the reports of States parties and it was inefficient to use the time allotted for that review to discuss methods of work.

5. The CHAIRMAN observed that he was not trying to press members of the Group to continue the work in the Drafting Group or to delay the review of reports of States parties. Most members of the Working Group, however, were anxious to pursue the work in the Drafting Group. Many delegations had submitted their views on the future composition and procedures of the Working Group at the beginning of the year, and the reports of States parties had been available for some considerable

(The Chairman)

time, so it could hardly be argued that members needed more time to prepare for the review and for a discussion on methods of work. The non-aligned countries had also put forward excellent compromise proposals which warranted consideration. If the Drafting Group did not continue its work, the Working Group would be unable to submit recommendations to the Economic and Social Council at its current session in accordance with its mandate.

6. Mr. DIA (Senegal) pointed out that the statement just made by the representative of the Soviet Union was illogical and full of contradictions. He could not see why the Soviet delegation needed so much time to prepare for the review of reports of States parties when those reports had been available for many months. If the small delegations of developing countries had managed to prepare adequately for the review of reports of States parties, he did not see why a great Power should not have been able to do so. If the Soviet representative was having problems in preparing for the session, he should have said so when the session began.

7. He also did not see how the discussion on future methods of work could detract from the review of reports when the Working Group was fully up to date with the review and even had time to spare. The Soviet Union had participated quite willingly in the work of the Drafting Group the previous afternoon and had not voiced any opposition to its work at that stage. The Drafting Group had made considerable progress at that meeting and when the proposals of the non-aligned countries had been put forward the Soviet representative had in fact more or less agreed to their substance and had simply said that he needed to consult his Government on the details. He was curious to know why the Soviet representative had now changed his position.

8. The Soviet delegation had not been opposed to changing the Working Group's agenda at an earlier stage, yet it was apparently unable to support any change now. That again was somewhat contradictory. He could not help feeling that the Soviet Union was trying to block the Working Group's work.

9. Mr. KORDS (German Democratic Republic) observed that his delegation was not opposed to trying to reach a compromise on methods of work, but it needed time to consider the various proposals submitted to the Drafting Group and to consult its Government. In particular, the proposals of the non-aligned countries, which had been received only the previous day required time for serious consideration.

10. Mr. SVERRE (Norway) said that he was gratified to find that the representative of the German Democratic Republic thought the proposals by the non-aligned countries warranted serious consideration. On the other hand, he did not see why the Drafting Group could not pursue its discussion as it had done the previous afternoon, leaving difficult issues aside for consideration at a later stage.

(Mr. Sverre, Norway)

11. The representative of the Soviet Union had expressed surprise that, after agreeing to the agenda at the beginning of the session, Norway should now be prepared to alter it. He wished to point out that when it became clear that there was time available for other matters, it was only logical to use that time to discuss future methods of work rather than leave that crucial discussion for the last three days of the session. The Soviet representative had agreed to that procedure earlier but had now changed his mind. As experience with the present procedure for considering reports of States parties showed, there was much room for improvement and an in-depth discussion of methods of work was essential.

12. Mrs. JIMENEZ BUTRAGUEÑO (Spain) said that she could not see why the concerns of both the Soviet Union and other delegations could not be accommodated. As long as the Working Group was up to date with its consideration of reports, it could devote its spare time to discussing methods of work. The report of the Working Group on its previous session had been rather thin, perhaps in part, because it had failed to define its methods of work clearly enough. The Group might benefit from dealing with both tasks as the same time.

13. Mr. DIA (Senegal) suggested that, if the German Democratic Republic simply needed more time, the Drafting Group might resume its work the following afternoon when that delegation should be in a position to give its views on the proposals by the non-aligned countries.

14. Mr. SOFINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that in the light of the experience of the past few days he did not think like the representative of Norway that the Working Group could deal with two issues at once. If, as the representative of Spain had inferred, no decision had been taken on methods of work at the previous session, it was because the matter was too complex. He agreed with the representative of the German Democratic Republic that more time was needed to consider the proposals on methods of work. He had devoted a great deal of time to examining the proposal put forward by India at the previous afternoon's meeting, but he was unable to take a position on it pending instructions from his Government. In fact he could not take a position on any change in the composition or financial implications of the Working Group without instructions from his Government. He therefore reiterated the view that the experience of the past few days had shown that it was detrimental to the Working Group's efficiency to consider methods of work at the present stage.

15. The CHAIRMAN again observed that the Drafting Group had been convened only when the Working Group had saved time by completing its work ahead of schedule.

16. The differences in the Working Group were not going to be easy to resolve, but he would like the Working Group to be able to make recommendations to the Council at its current session. He suggested therefore that it should reconvene as a plenary drafting group open to all members of the Working Group, to consider how such recommendations might best be prepared.

17. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.